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SUBJECT: JOURNEY TO JAFFNA: THE LTTE VIEW OF THE PEACE PROCESS; A FIRSTHAND LOOK

REF: (A) COLOMBO 1377 (B) COLOMBO 1175 (C) COLOMBO 1026

¶1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

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SUMMARY  
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¶2. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1989, AN OFFICIAL AMERICAN VISITED THE LTTE-DOMINATED JAFFNA PENINSULA. POLOFF WAS PART OF A FACT-FINDING VISIT BY DIPLOMATICS FROM TWELVE WESTERN MISSIONS WHICH WAS ORGANIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) (REF B). LTTE SPOKESMAN ANTON BALASINGHAM, FLANKED BY OTHER TOP LTTE OFFICERS, PROVIDED A TWO-HOUR BRIEFING FOR THE DIPLOMATICS IN WHICH THE LTTE'S VIEW OF THE PEACE PROCESS FEATURED PROMINENTLY. THE LTTE PERSPECTIVE WAS ANCHORED IN PROFOUND DISTRUST OF THE GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY THE SECURITY FORCES, AND THE BELIEF THAT THE LTTE HAS MADE MAJOR CONCESSIONS IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE, INCLUDING THE ACCEPTANCE OF A FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT WITHIN A UNITED SRI LANKA IN LIEU OF TAMIL EELAM--AN INDEPENDENT TAMIL HOMELAND. BALASINGHAM FELT THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WERE NOT GOING WELL, LARGELY BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT BEEN TAKING THE PEACE TALKS SERIOUSLY ENOUGH, ESPECIALLY IN FAILING TO IMPLEMENT CONDITIONS THE LTTE REGARDS AS ESSENTIAL CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES. THE LTTE HAS ALSO NOT BEEN SATISFIED WITH THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT DELEGATES TO THE PEACE TALKS, NOR WITH THE FREQUENCY OR DURATION OF THE TALKS. BALASINGHAM ALSO EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION AT THE FAILURE OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PRODUCE A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT--WHICH WOULD FORM THE BASIS OF POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS.

¶3. BIO NOTES ON BALASINGHAM ARE IN PARAS 27 AND 28. WE ARE ALSO REPORTING BY SEPTEL ON THE STATE OF THE JAFFNA ECONOMY AND THE PROPOSED RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM FOR THE NORTH; THE SECURITY SITUATION IN JAFFNA AND POINT PEDRO TOWNS; THE OPERATIONS OF NON-LTTE GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN JAFFNA--INCLUDING THE GOVERNMENT; AND LIFE ON THE JAFFNA PENINSULA. END SUMMARY.

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¶ 14. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1989, AN EMBOFF HAS MADE AN OFFICIAL TRIP TO THE JAFFNA PENINSULA, STRONGHOLD OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE) WHO HAVE BEEN WAGING A BLOODY ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD INSURGENCY AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA. ARRANGED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) AS A FACT-FINDING JOURNEY (REF B), POLOFF, TOGETHER WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF ELEVEN OTHER WESTERN MISSIONS, VISITED JAFFNA FOR TWO DAYS. DURING THE TRIP, THE GROUP WAS GIVEN A BRIEFING BY THE LTTE IN WHICH THE PEACE PROCESS FEATURED PROMINENTLY. THE GOVERNMENT AGENT WAS GIVEN EQUAL TIME TO BRIEF THE DIPLOMATICS; HE FOCUSED ON THE PROPOSED REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM (SEPTEL). THE DIPLOMATIC GROUP HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASSESS THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION OF THE NORTH--VISITING THE JAFFNA TEACHING HOSPITAL, THE UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA, AND THE POINT PEDRO HOSPITAL; AND MEETING WITH THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS, SAVE THE CHILDREN (UK), THE COUNCIL OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND A CROSS-SECTION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS (SEPTEL).

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LTTE BRIEFS THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

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¶ 15. A TWO-HOUR BRIEFING WAS PROVIDED BY LTTE SPOKESMAN, ANTON BALASINGHAM, FLANKEED BY OTHER TOP LTTE LEADERS--TAMILCHELVAM (HEAD OF THE POLITICAL SECTION), DOMINIC (HEAD OF ADMINISTRATION), RAVI (HEAD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT), BALAKUMAR (DESCRIBED AS A SENIOR LTTE MEMBER AND FORMER HEAD OF EELAM REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION OF STUDENTS (EROS)), ILANGKUMARAN (HEAD OF EDUCATION), AND SELVANAYAGAM (ECONOMIC ADVISOR, WHO ALSO ACTED AS A TRANSLATOR FOR RAVI). MR. BALASINGHAM'S AUSTRALIAN-BORN WIFE, ADELE BALASINGHAM, ALSO ATTENDED THE MEETING.

¶ 16. THE BRIEFING WAS CONDUCTED IN A QUITE FORMAL MANNER AT THE POLITICAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE LTTE--THE VENUE OF THE THREE ROUNDS OF PEACE TALKS CONDUCTED TO DATE BETWEEN THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT. THE LTTE TEAM SAT FACING THE DIPLOMATICS; EACH GROUP AT A SEPARATE LINE OF TABLES. IN BETWEEN WAS A STAND PROMINENTLY FEATURING PHOTOGRAPHS OF LTTE SUPREME LEADER, VELUPILLAI PRABHAKARAN (WHO THE VISITING DIPLOMATICS NEVER MET), AND TOPPED BY A SMALL FLAG OF TAMIL EELAM. BALASINGHAM, SELVANAYAGAM (BY FAR THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE LTTE TEAM) AND MRS. BALASINGHAM SPOKE FLUENT ENGLISH. IT APPEARED THAT THE REST OF THE GROUP SPOKE LITTLE, IF ANY, ENGLISH. MRS. BALASINGHAM'S PRESENCE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENSURING THAT THERE WERE NO ENGLISH LANGUAGE MISUNDERSTANDINGS--ESPECIALLY SINCE MOST OF THE DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES WERE NOT NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS. CONSISTENT WITH THEIR APOITICAL STANCE, ICRC REPRESENTATIVES DID NOT ATTEND THE MEETING.

¶ 17. BALASINGHAM OPENED THE BRIEFING BY STATING THAT THE LTTE FELT THE VISIT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL BECAUSE IT WOULD ENABLE THE DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS TO OBSERVE FOR THEMSELVES THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH PEOPLE LIVED ON THE JAFFNA PENINSULA, TO UNDERSTAND THE LTTE POSITION IN THE ON-GOING SEARCH FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT TO THE ETHNIC CONFLICT, AND TO ASSESS THE NEEDS FOR THE PROPOSED REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM. HE SAID THAT THE PEACE PROCESS HAS IN A "CRUCIAL AND CRITICAL TIME", AND INDICATED THAT PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WERE NOT GOING WELL. THE TONE OF HIS PRESENTATION HAS REASONABLE AND MEASURED; HE CLEARLY MADE AN EFFORT NOT TO BE OVERLY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT. AFTER SPEAKING FOR ABOUT FORTY MINUTES, HE ENTERTAINED QUESTIONS.

¶ 18. BALASINGHAM THANKED THE ICRC FOR FACILITATING THE

TRIP, AS WELL AS FOR ITS LAUDABLE HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE TAMIL PEOPLE. HE ALSO STATED THAT FROM COLOMBO IT HAS VERY HARD FOR THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS TO KNOW WHAT THE TIGERS WERE THINKING, AND EXPRESSED HIS HOPE THAT DIPLOMATIC VISITS WOULD CONTINUE.

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PROFOUND DISTRUST REIGNS  
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¶9. THROUGHOUT BALASINGHAM'S PRESENTATION, HE CLEARLY REFLECTED A DEEPLY FELT MISTRUST OF THE GOVERNMENT--AND ESPECIALLY THE SECURITY FORCES. THE LTTE IS INTENSELY AWARE OF BEING SURROUNDED BY GOVERNMENT FORCES--ESTIMATED BY THEM TO BE 25,000 STRONG. THE TIGERS SAID THEY SEE THE THE ARMY-CONTROLED KAYTS ISLANDS TO THE WEST, THE PALALI AIRBASE AND ARMY-CONTROLED COAST TO THE NORTH, THE ELEPHANT PASS ARMY BASE TO THE SOUTHEAST, THE POONERYN ARMY BASE TO THE SOUTHWEST, AND THE NAVY ON THE ADJACENT SEAS. THEY ALSO DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS THE VICTIMS OF A BRUTAL WAR AND A STRANGULATING GOVERNMENT-IMPOSED ECONOMIC EMBARGO. IN SHORT, THEY PAINTED A PICTURE OF THE TAMIL PEOPLE OF JAFFNA AS HAVING BEEN UNDER SIEGE FOR YEARS AND AS HAVING BORNE UNTOLD SUFFERING AS A RESULT. THEY REMIND VISITORS THAT THE BOMBING OF JAFFNA TOWN CEASED ONLY IN EARLY 1994 AND SHELLING OCCURRED WELL INTO THE LATTER PART OF THE YEAR. POLOFF OBSERVED SIGNIFICANT, THOUGH NOT DEVASTATING, WAR DAMAGE IN JAFFNA TOWN. THE VISITING DIPLOMATICS WERE GIVEN EXTENSIVE LISTS OF WAR DAMAGE ON THE JAFFNA PENINSULA, WHICH WILL FORM THE BASIS FOR THE PROPOSED REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM. CONTRIBUTING TO THE SIEGE MENTALITY, THE LTTE CONSIDERS THE TAMIL PEOPLE TO HAVE BEEN HISTORICALLY VICTIMIZED THROUGH SYSTEMATIC DISCRIMINATION BY THE GOVERNMENT.

¶10. BALASINGHAM DID, HOWEVER, VOICE SOME CONFIDENCE IN PRESIDENT CHANDRIKA KUMARATUNGA, INDICATING THAT THE LTTE FELT SHE SINCERELY DESIRED PEACE AND HAD AN UNPRECEDENTED MANDATE FOR PEACE FROM THE SINHALESE PEOPLE--WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AS A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION IN SINHALESE THINKING.

¶11. MANY IN THE LTTE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED BY THE BELIEVE THAT HARDLINERS IN THE GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES WANT TO RESUME THE WAR, AND STILL INTEND TO LAUNCH AN OFFENSIVE ON JAFFNA. THE LTTE ARGUED THAT THE SECURITY FORCES HAVE NOT SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED THEIR OFFENSIVE POSTURE (ASIDE FROM THAT REQUIRED BY THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES). BALASINGHAM CITED RECENT STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF DEFENSE ANURUDDHA RATWATTE IN WHICH HE SAID THAT THE ARMED FORCES SHOULD STAND READY TO INFILTRATE CRUSHING MILITARY DEFEAT ON THE TIGERS IN THE EVENT THAT THE PEACE PROCESS FAILS. HE ALSO CHARGED THAT THE ARMY WAS ARBITRARILY RESTRICTING THE FLOW OF GOODS WHICH WERE RECENTLY TAKEN OFF THE EMBARGO LIST--BUT WHICH THE ARMY FEELS HAVE MILITARY APPLICATION, E.G., CEMENT.

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CONCESSIONS IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE  
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¶12. IN SPITE OF ITS DISTRUST OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE LTTE SAYS IT HAS MADE MAJOR CONCESSIONS IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE. FOREMOST AMONG THESE HAS BEEN THE OFFER TO GIVE UP THEIR QUEST FOR TAMIL EELAM--AN INDEPENDENT TAMIL HOMELAND. IN EXCHANGE, BALASINGHAM STATED, THE LTTE WILL ACCEPT A "FEDERAL FORM OF AUTONOMY FOR THE TAMILS OF THE NORTH AND EAST, INCLUDING THEIR OWN LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIAL POWERS, WITHIN A UNITED SRI LANKA". BALASINGHAM REFUSED TO BE PINNED DOWN ON THE DETAILS OF THE DIVISION OF POWER IN SUCH A FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, BUT SUGGESTED THAT THE AMERICAN OR AUSTRALIAN SYSTEMS MIGHT SERVE AS MODELS, WHILE THE INDIAN SYSTEM WOULD NOT. HE INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT

THE "COLLECTIVE ASPIRATIONS" OF THE TAMIL PEOPLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION AND A GUARANTEE OF THEIR RIGHTS WOULD HAVE TO BE INCORPORATED INTO ANY SUCH SYSTEM.

¶13. HE ALSO INDICATED THAT BOTH THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES, THE "TRADITIONAL HOMELANDS OF THE TAMIL-SPEAKING PEOPLE", WOULD HAVE TO BE CONTROLLED BY TAMILS IN ANY FEDERAL ARRANGEMENT--THOUGH HE DID ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE MUSLIMS HAD SPECIAL CONCERNS AND CONCEDED THAT A MEASURE OF AUTONOMY WOULD BE NECESSARY FOR THEM IN CERTAIN AREAS OF THE EAST. IN DISCUSSING THE ROLE OF THE NON-LTTE TAMILS IN THE PROPOSED FEDERAL SYSTEM, BALASINGHAM INDICATED THAT THE LTTE INTENDED TO FORGE A DEMOCRATIC STATE IN THE NORTHEAST WHICH WOULD INCLUDE ALL TAMILS--THOUGH HE WENT ON TO MENTION THAT THERE WAS A SPECIAL PROBLEM WITH THOSE TAMILS WHO HAD BORNE ARMS AGAINST THE LTTE. BALASINGHAM SUGGESTED THAT THE CURRENT EFFORTS BY THE GOVERNMENT TO FORMULATE A NEW CONSTITUTION SHOULD FOCUS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FEDERAL CONSTITUTION, AND INDICATED THAT THE LTTE SHOULD BE CONSULTED IN THIS PROCESS.

¶14. COMMENT: SIX MONTHS AGO THE TIGER DEMAND FOR AN INDEPENDENT TAMIL EELAM--COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE AND NONNEGOTIABLE IN THE VIEW OF THE GOVERNMENT--SEEMED, PERHAPS, THE MOST INTRACTABLE OBSTACLE TO PEACE. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE LTTE CONCESSION TO PARTICIPATE IN A FEDERAL SYSTEM, IF GENUINE, REPRESENTS A MAJOR STEP FORWARD IN THE PEACE PROCESS. BALASINGHAM CLEARLY UNDERSTANDS THE POTENT PROPAGANDA VALUE OF EMPHASIZING THE "SHIFT" IN THE TIGER POSITION. THE TRUE EXTENT OF THE SHIFT, HOWEVER, IS UNLIKELY TO BE APPARENT UNLESS AND UNTIL SERIOUS POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN. END COMMENT.

¶15. THE LTTE ALSO CITES ITS AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CURRENT CESSION OF HOSTILITIES AS A MAJOR PEACE CONCESSION. HARDLINERS AMONG THE LTTE CADRE SEE THE CESSION AS DISADVANTAGEOUS--PRIMARILY BECAUSE IT GIVES THE GOVERNMENT BREATHING SPACE TO RE-ARM, RE-EQUIP AND RE-TRAIN. BALASINGHAM ALSO POINTED TO THE LTTE RELEASE OF PRISONERS LAST SEPTEMBER AS A FURTHER CONCESSION.

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LTTE: GOVERNMENT FAILS TO TAKE PEACE TALKS SERIOUSLY  
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¶16. BALASINGHAM EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE PEACE PROCESS, STATING THAT PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WERE NOT GOING WELL. THE PRIMARY REASON, HE FELT, WAS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT BEEN TAKING THE TALKS SERIOUSLY ENOUGH. SPECIFICALLY, HE SAID, THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT SERIOUSLY ADDRESSED ISSUES OF MAJOR CONCERN TO THE LTTE--THE TOTAL LIFTING OF THE ECONOMIC EMBARGO, THE OPENING OF A LAND ROUTE BETWEEN THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH, THE ABANDONMENT OF THE POONERYN ARMY CAMP, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT CEASEFIRE.

¶17. IN ADDITION, THE LTTE SAYS THAT THE GOVERNMENT DELEGATES TO THE FIRST THREE ROUNDS OF PEACE TALKS WERE INEXPERIENCED AND POORLY PREPARED AMATEURS. NO POLITICAL DECISION-MAKERS OR SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, WHO MIGHT HAVE SUBSTANTIVE IMPACT ON THE PEACE PROCESS, WERE INCLUDED. MOREOVER, BALASINGHAM DESCRIBED THE FIRST THREE ROUNDS AS "BRIEF DISCUSSIONS"--THE GOVERNMENT DELEGATES SPENDING NO MORE THAN A FEW HOURS IN JAFFNA DURING EACH ROUND--WITH NO PROPER AGENDA, LACK OF TIME TO CLEARLY AND THOROUGHLY DISCUSS THE ISSUES, AND NO JOINT STATEMENT. LTTE FRUSTRATION ON THIS POINT WAS underscored by the rousing reception recently given an independent visit to JAFFNA by members of the SRI LANKA PARLIAMENT (REF C). BALASINGHAM DESCRIBED THE ON-GOING EXCHANGE OF LETTERS BETWEEN THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT, UPWARDS OF 50 TO DATE, AS UNPRODUCTIVE. RATHER THAN OFFERING CONSTRUCTIVE IDEAS, HE

CHARACTERIZED THE LETTERS AS TENDING TO POINT FINGERS AND ASSIGN BLAME FOR THE HICUPS IN THE PEACE PROCESS. THE LTTE HAS FURTHER INTERPRETED THE LETTERS IT RECEIVES FROM THE GOVERNMENT AS BEING DELIBERATELY WRITTEN IN A MANNER WHICH WOULD ALLOW THEM TO LATER BE RELEASED TO THE PRESS AS EVIDENCE OF TIGER INTRANSIGENCE IN THE PEACE PROCESS. BALASINGHAM POINTED OUT THAT IN ORDER TO MAKE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS, THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE ABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS FACE-TO-FACE AND AT LENGTH.

¶18. THE LACK OF A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT (ORIGINALLY PROMISED BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR EARLY FEBRUARY) APPEARED TO DEEPLY FRUSTRATE BALASINGHAM. HE NOTED THAT IT SEEMED UNFAIR THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD ACCUSE THE LTTE OF NOT BEING SERIOUS ABOUT POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK WHICH THE TIGERS HAVE REPEATEDLY DEMANDED BE OFFERED AS THE BASIS FOR SUCH NEGOTIATION. (NOTE: PRESIDENT KUMARATUNGA HAS SINCE INVITED THE LTTE TO BEGIN POLITICAL TALKS IN EARLY APRIL, PROMISING TO PROVIDE THEM FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL IN ADVANCE AND SUGGESTING THAT GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATORS WOULD BE PREPARED FOR AT LEAST A TWO DAY STAY. SO FAR, THE TIGERS HAVE NOT RESPONDED TO THE OFFER.) .  
END NOTE.)

¶19. THE LTTE QHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE IT AS AN EQUAL PARTNER IN THE PEACE PROCESS; AND BRISTLED AT RECENT UNILATERAL ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT--THE OPENING OF THE ELEPHANT PASS ROAD, RELOCATION OF THE POONERYN CAMP AND THE PROPOSED FRENCH MEDIATOR IN THE PEACE PROCESS (REF A). THE LTTE VIEW IS THAT SUCH DECISIONS SHOULD BE NEGOTIATED BILATERALLY. THEY FEEL THAT "IMPERIALLY" DISPENSED UNILATERAL DECISIONS BY THE GOVERNMENT WEAKEN THEIR NEGOTIATING POSITION AND MAKE IT APPEAR IN JAFFNA AS IF THEY ARE CAVING-IN TO THE GOVERNMENT. THEY THEREFORE INTEND TO REJECT SUCH DECISIONS OUT-OF-HAND. (COMMENT: WHILE BALASINGHAM STATED THAT THE LTTE CURRENTLY SEES NO ROLE FOR A FOREIGN MEDIATOR, BELIEVING THAT THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO RESOLVE THE ETHNIC PROBLEM THEMSELVES, HE DID SAY THAT THE LTTE WOULD SEEK OUT FOREIGN INTERVENTION SHOULD THE PEACE TALKS FAIL. HE REFUSED TO BE DRAWN OUT ON WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE THE FAILURE OF THE PEACE TALKS, AND WHAT FORM THE FOREIGN INTERVENTION MIGHT TAKE. END COMMENT.)

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#### CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES

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¶20. VIEWING THEMSELVES AS UNDER SIEGE, THE LTTE HAS FOCUSED ON FOUR GOVERNMENT CONCESSIONS WHICH THEY SAY ARE ESSENTIAL TO BUILDING UP THE CONFIDENCE OF THE LTTE IN THE GOVERNMENT--THE TOTAL LIFTING OF THE ECONOMIC EMBARGO, THE OPENING OF A LAND ROUTE BETWEEN THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH, THE ABANDONMENT OF THE POONERYN ARMY CAMP, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT CEASEFIRE. DURING THE BRIEFING, BALASINGHAM STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE MEASURES TIME AND AGAIN.

¶21. IF PEACE IS TO BE ACHIEVED, AND REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE NORTH TO OCCUR, THE LTTE MAINTAINS THAT THE PEOPLE NEED UNRESTRICTED ACCESS TO GOODS AND MATERIALS. ITEMS WHICH STILL REMAIN UNAVAILABLE BECAUSE THEY ARE EMBARGOED--SUCH AS FUEL, SPARE PARTS, AND FERTILIZER--PARALYZE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THE LTTE CLAIMS THAT THE EMBARGO DOES NOT PREVENT THEM FROM PROCURING THE MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES NEEDED TO MAINTAIN ITS MILITARY CAPABILITY. THE EMBARGO, IT SAYS, THEREFORE MERELY HAMSTRINGS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORDINARY PEOPLE.

¶22. IN THE SAME VEIN, THE LTTE ARGUES THAT THE OPENING OF A LAND ROUTE BETWEEN JAFFNA AND THE SOUTH

IS ESSENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. IT HAS FOCUSED ON THE POONERYN ROUTE AS THE ROUTE OF CHOICE, AND HAS STATED THAT THE OPENING OF THIS ROUTE CAN ONLY BE ACCOMPLISHED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ABANDONMENT OF THE THREE-YEAR-OLD POONERYN ARMY CAMP (THE SCENE IN NOVEMBER, 1993 OF THE BLOODIEST BATTLE IN THE ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD INSURGENCY) WHICH WAS BUILT SO AS TO STRATEGICALLY BLOCK THE POONERYN ROAD. CONTINUED LTTE INSISTENCE THAT POONERYN BE ABANDONED, IN SPITE OF GOVERNMENT MOVES TO RELOCATE THE CAMP 500 METERS FROM THE ROAD, HAS LED TO GOVERNMENT CHARGES THAT THE LTTE HAS BEEN DISSEMBLING--SEEKING A STRATEGIC MILITARY GOAL UNDER THE GUISE OF CONFIDENCE-BUILDING.

NONETHELESS, BALASINGHAM TOLD THE DIPLOMATS THAT THE LTTE VIEWS THE ABANDONMENT OF POONERYN AS AN ISSUE IN AND OF ITSELF, QUITE SEPARATE FROM THE ISSUE OF THE OPENING OF A LAND ROUTE. HE CLEARLY STATED THAT, FOR THE LTTE, THE ABANDONMENT OF THE POONERYN CAMP HAS BECOME A SYMBOL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO THE PEACE PROCESS AND OF ITS INTENT TO ABANDON ITS MILITARY PLANS TO INVADE JAFFNA. HE CLAIMED THAT THE LTTE RECOGNIZES THE LEGITIMATE SECURITY NEEDS OF THE GOVERNMENT FORCES, NOTING THAT THE LTTE IS NOT DEMANDING THE REMOVAL OF THE THIRTY-YEAR-OLD ARMY CAMP AT ELEPHANT PASS. IN HIS VIEW, "EGOTISTS" IN THE ARMY DO NOT WANT TO LET POONERYN GO, BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE ABANDONMENT OF THE CAMP WOULD BE "A BITTER PILL FOR THE ARMY TO SWALLOW".

¶23. THE LTTE ALSO SAYS A PERMANENT CEASEFIRE IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE PERMANENT REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE NORTH. BALASINGHAM STATED THAT PROBLEMS IN CLARIFYING MODALITIES OF THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES AGREEMENT HAD BEEN COMPLICATING A PERMANENT CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT. (HE DID NOT CLARIFY WHAT THESE PROBLEMS WERE.) WHEN ASKED WHY THESE MODALITIES HAD NOT BEEN WORKED OUT PRIOR TO THE SIGNING OF THE AGREEMENT, HE SHEEPISHLY REVEALED THAT THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT HAD PROCEEDED QUICKLY WITH THE SIGNING OF THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES AGREEMENT BECAUSE PRESIDENT KUMARATUNGA WANTED TO SIGN THE DOCUMENT ON THE BIRTHDAY OF HER FATHER--WHO WAS ASSASSINATED WHILE PRIME MINISTER.

¶24. COMMENT: INTERESTINGLY, BALASINGHAM CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED 39 BILLION RUPEE REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM WAS NOT REGARDED BY THE LTTE AS A PRE-CONDITION FOR PEACE TALKS--A VIEW CONTRARY TO EARLIER TIGER PRONOUNCEMENTS ON THE SUBJECT. BALASINGHAM PORTRAYED FREE TRADE (UNEMCUMBERED BY THE PRESENCE OF SECURITY FORCES) AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PEACE AS ESSENTIAL FOR THE SUCCESSFUL FULFILLMENT OF A REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM. NONETHELESS, ALTHOUGH PRIMARILY FOCUSED ON THE PEACE PROCESS AT THE MOMENT, THE LTTE APPEARS VERY SERIOUS ABOUT THE REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM, AND PRESENTED THE DIPLOMATIC GROUP WITH A VOLUMINOUS NEEDS ASSESSMENT (SEPTEL). END COMMENT.

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COMMENT  
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¶25. BALASINGHAM, SPEAKING FOR THE LTTE, PRESENTED A RATIONAL VIEW OF THE LTTE POSITION AND CONCERNs ANCHORED IN HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES AND INTENSIFIED BY BROKEN PROMISES AND POLITICAL GAMESMANSHIP BY SUCCESSIVE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENTS. THE LTTE'S STATED AIM OF RESOLVING THE ETHNIC CONFLICT THROUGH A FORMULA GRANTING SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE TAMIL PEOPLE WITHIN A UNITED SRI LANKA IS, ON ITS FACE, A REASONABLE POSITION. TO SUSPICIOUS SINHALESE (AND SKEPTICAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS), HOWEVER, THE APPARENT TIGER REASONABILITY COULD JUST AS READILY BE A CLEVER PLOY TO MASK THEIR UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO TAMIL EELAM AND TO STRENGTHEN THEIR STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC

POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE GOVERNMENT. THE GOVERNMENT, REMEMBERING THE SUDDEN AND MURDEROUS PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE OF THE LTTE WHICH HERALDED THE START OF EELAM WAR TWO IN 1990, FINDS IT AS HARD TO TRUST THE TIGERS AS THE TIGERS SAY IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO TRUST THE GOVERNMENT.

¶26. THE MEANS OF RESOLVING THE ENSUING DILEMMA WILL LARGELY DEPEND ON THE ABILITY OF THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT TO MAINTAIN OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION AND TO KEEP ON TALKING. MEANWHILE, FOR US, AND FOR OTHER OBSERVERS, OPPORTUNITIES SUCH AS THIS TO INTERACT MORE DIRECTLY WITH THE LTTE AND OBSERVE THE SITUATION IN THE LTTE-CONTROLLED NORTH CAN ONLY HELP US TO ASSESS BETTER THE APPROPRIATENESS OF AND OPTIONS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL ROLE AS THE GOVERNMENT-LTTE DIALOGUE DEVELOPS. END COMMENT.

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BALASINGHAM BIO NOTES

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¶27. BALASINGHAM CAME ACROSS AS VERY BRIGHT, PERSUASIVE, ARTICULATE AND PROFESSIONAL. HE IS COMPLETELY FLUENT IN ENGLISH. BALASINGHAM'S BRIEFING WAS WELL-PREPARED AND PRESENTED IN A REASONABLE AND RATIONAL TONE; HE AVOIDED BEING OVERLY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT. HE SEEMED CLEAR ABOUT HIS OBJECTIVES; AND GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF BEING SINCERELY TROUBLED AND APPREHENSIVE AS HE DESCRIBED THE FALTERING PEACE PROCESS. HE ALSO APPEARED TO BE A POWER TO RECKON WITH IN THE LTTE HIERARCHY. DURING THE BRIEFING, THERE WAS NOTICEABLE DEFERENCE TO HIM BY THE OTHER LTTE LEADERS--AT ONE POINT WHEN A QUESTION ABOUT THE LTTE'S PRIORITIES FOR RECONSTRUCTION CAUSED RAVI (THROUGH HIS INTERPRETER) TO STUMBLE, AND SOME DEBATE TO ENSUE, BALASINGHAM DEFTLY CUT IN, PROVIDING THE ANSWER. HE ALSO CONFIDENTLY INITIATED THE PRIVATE MEETING WITH POLOFF; AN ACT WHICH IMPLIED CONSIDERABLE AUTHORITY.

¶28. IN THE MIDST OF THE WEIGHTY DISCUSSIONS, THERE WERE SOME LIGHT TOUCHES. THE BALASINGHAMS BROUGHT THEIR DOG--A MEDIUM SIZE MUTT--TO THE BRIEFING. THE DOG ROMPED IN THE MIDST OF FORMAL HANDSHAKES AND STERN LTTE CEREMONIAL GUARDS. MRS. BALASINGHAM (AND AGAIN THE DOG) ACCOMPANIED BALASINGHAM TO HIS NIGHTTIME MEETING WITH THE POLOFF AS WELL. (MRS. BALASINGHAM OFFERED NO SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTS DURING EITHER MEETING.) LTTE CADRE ARE FORBIDDEN TO SMOKE--WITH THE EXCEPTION OF BALASINGHAM, A CHAIN SMOKER, WHO HAS A SPECIAL EXEMPTION FROM PRABHAKARAN. IRONICALLY, TOBACCO, SMUGGLED TO INDIA, IS AN IMPORTANT CASH CROP ON THE PENINSULA.

SCHAFFER